

Interfaith Service in Memory of Pope John Paul II

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith in me. In my Father’s home there are many dwelling places.”

To all who are present I want to express thanks on behalf of the Catholic Church in this area for your goodness in coming. We gather here to honor the memory of a great person, one who had the gift of touching many hearts. And, as I have recalled these past couple of days, it was a gift he exercised here in our City of Baltimore.

I wish to thank the many who have written to me already and to acknowledge the telephone calls and e-mails communicating for all our people a message of sympathy and sense of loss at the passing to the Lord of Pope John Paul II.

When I was looking for a passage that reflected our concern today I turned to these words from the Gospel of John, and remember an event involving Pope John Paul within a few weeks of 9/11. We had assembled at the Vatican for the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Office of Bishop. The Holy Father invited the Fraternal Delegates from other Christian Churches to join him for dinner.

At the beginning of the meal the Pope turned to me and asked, “How did the events of September 11 affect you in Baltimore?” I responded that we were reminded of how fragile is our grasp on life, and how dependent we must be on God’s Providence. Then, in his accustomed style, he went around the table, inquiring of his guests about the lessons to be learned from the event. It was a sobering conversation, and it reflected the Pope’s personal openness, as he quizzed bishops from the Armenian Apostolic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, and Anglican Churches,

as well Catholic bishops from the West Indies, Germany, Ireland, Canada, and Holland about the aftermath of the great terrorist event.

It was a way in which he illustrated one of the principal thrusts of his time as Pope in seeking greater unity in the family of those who look to Jesus Christ for inspiration and direction. “That all may be one,” was the prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper, and Karol Wojtyla took that as a title of an encyclical and as a motto of life.

As a bishop at the Second Vatican Council, no doubt recalling his days under the Nazi tyranny in Poland, he helped write the historic Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, which asserted that precisely “in the mystery of the Church,” the Council remembers “the bond that spiritually ties the people of New Covenant to Abraham’s stock.” The document lists a number of these ties—the revelation contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Patriarchs and Moses and the prophets. I cannot forget that day in 1987 when the Holy Father met at Castel Gandolfo with Jews and Catholics from the International Liaison Committee and recalled his Jewish friends and schoolmates from his home town in Poland, their fate in the Holocaust and the lesson he derived from his meditation that morning on the Book of Exodus.

The same document speaks also of our ties with the Muslims, who with us “adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself, merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth.” When Cardinal Arinze, then President of the Council for Interreligious Dialogue, came to Baltimore in 1995, he met here with the leaders of the principal Muslim organizations in the United States. Out of that encounter and a later meeting in my residence came a meeting at which I introduced Imam W. Deen Mohammed and his principal councilors to Pope John Paul II.

When Pope John Paul came here to the Cathedral, he observed with great satisfaction.